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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2009

In Today's Papers

Clinton Sends Warm Messages to Turkey

All media outlets over the weekend gave positive and extensive coverage to Secretary Clinton's visit to Ankara as she completed her tour of the Middle East and Europe. Mainstream Hurriyet reported on Sunday, "during her talks with President Gul, PM Erdogan and FM Babacan, Secretary Clinton described Turkey and the US as countries committed to democracy, secularism and free market economy." Sunday's mainstream Sabah wrote, "in a press conference with FM Babacan, Clinton sent warm messages on issues including cooperation with Turkey in the fight against the PKK, Turkey's EU bid and the Middle East peace." All papers highlighted "Secretary Clinton's appearance on one of Turkey's most popular talk shows being a perfect way of practicing public diplomacy to improve the US image in Turkey." In addition to joining TV programs in Turkey, Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Secretary Clinton wrote an article for Zaman daily in connection with the International Women's Day," noting, "problems today are too big and too complex to be solved without the full participation of women."

In a related story, Sunday's liberal Radikal reported, "In a statement released on Saturday, Turkey and the US confirmed a joint vision document for cooperation on issues, including solving the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, assuring safety of energy supplies, normalizing Turkey-Armenia relations, finding a lasting solution in Cyprus, fighting against the PKK, cooperating in Afghanistan, cooperating on threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and boosting ties between young leaders of the two countries."

President Obama to Come to Turkey

Today's top story in the media is Secretary Clinton's announcement in her Ankara press conference, that President Obama will visit Turkey within a month. Media and commentators highlight that "a new chapter in ties between Turkey and the US will revive the strategic partnership between the two countries. In contrast to a Washington Times report which said "President Obama's chose not to deliver his address to the Muslim world from Turkey, leftist Taraf claims that, "Turkey is the place where Obama will address the Muslim world."

Mainstream Milliyet writes in, "With Obama, Anew," saying, "Obama has decided to go back to the traditional perception of Turkey's secular identity. The paper adds, 'That is why Secretary Clinton emphasized secularism in her messages in Ankara and why President Obama has decided not to use the Turkey visit to deliver his message.'" In a related story, liberal Radikal reports, "Washington declined to give guarantees about Obama's Armenian message, while Ankara declined to make commitments for meeting US demands in Afghanistan and Iraq." Omer Taspinar wrote in mainstream Sabah, "Turkey has emerged as an actor taken into account by policy makers in Washington. The Obama administration pays attention to Turkey, and this will pave the way for the opening of a healthier period in bilateral relations." Yasemin Congar wrote Sunday in leftist Taraf, "If Obama addresses the Islamic world from Turkey, he will stress 'There is no unbridgeable gap between the West and Islam; the universal values that unite the two worlds; and that the US looks at the Muslim world as a 'friend.' In doing so, he will be able, just as Secretary Clinton did when speaking to the CNN-Turk television yesterday, to cite Turkey's special characteristics as a 'positive example' in this sense."

Babacan: Obama's Turkey Visit will Give a Good Message to World Speaking to press on Sunday before departing for Tehran for the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) talks, Foreign Minister Babacan said that the exact date of President Obama's visit to Turkey would be announced by the US side. Babacan stressed that the US President paying one of his first international visits to Turkey would give a "good message to the world." Responding to a question, Babacan said "good developments" take place regarding the normalization of Turkey-Armenia ties, and interference by the third

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countries would "not be helpful." On Iran, Babacan said he was "not conveying any messages from the US to Tehran." On a question about the ties with Israel, Babacan said the two countries "never halted contacts." "We have strategic relations with Israel based on the national interests of both countries." Asked about the International Criminal Court's (ICC) issuance of an arrest warrant for Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Babacan said Turkey's priority was the protection of stability and peace in Sudan. "No one should ignore the likely impacts of the arrest of their president on the Sudanese people," emphasized Babacan.

Editorial Commentary on Clinton's Ankara Visit, Obama Trip to Turkey

Melis Alphan wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Secretary Clinton's participation in the NTV talk show was a successful public relations effort. She was very nice and candid in her answers. The whole thing was a good image restorer."

Fehmi Kuru wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "Once again we can see the failure of opposition and those who negatively argued about Prime Minister Erdogan's attitude in Davos. After the Davos event, some strongly believed and waited for serious consequences in Turkey's relationship with the United States and Israel. The reality is just the opposite. Hillary Clinton visit was very positive and she even announced the arrival of President Obama."

Ali Aslan wrote in Islamist oriented Zaman: "Ankara believes that there are important roles it can play in the region and for world peace. The new Washington believes in listening to what friends are thinking. The two approaches are contributing to each other, and the immediate result is Turkey becomes one of President Obama's first international stops."

Taha Akyol wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Secretary Clinton put an end to the moderate Islam paranoia by underlining democracy and secular constitution in Turkey. It was also good to hear her advice to the Prime Minister about being tolerant to criticism. The Bush administration presented 'ugly American' image with unilateralism and fighter attitude. It is nice to observe the 'pretty American' nowadays with a new administration which is for dialogue and peace."

Erdal Guven wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "The upcoming

Obama visit is an indication of Turkey's importance vis-à-vis the U.S. And this importance is not only limited to Turkey's EU process and its NATO membership. Turkey is important for Washington because it is a regional player, strategically located and because of its secular-democratic system. There are a lot of issues to discuss with President Obama and the nice thing is that Obama speaks differently than Bush – a way of speaking Ankara likes to hear."

Omer Taspinar wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Obama's upcoming visit to Ankara shows that the US wants to regain Turkey's alliance. This is because of the fact that Turkey is gaining power not solely due to its geostrategic importance, but also for its political identity and its role. Obama and his team understand Turkey much better than the Bush Administration. They have lots of commonalities with Turkey in their approach to the region. Turkey will be the first Muslim country with secular, democratic and westernized characteristics that Obama will visit. During this important visit, Obama is expected to call Turkey to come to an agreement with Armenia and announce it to the world, so that this issue does not remain a barrier in other bilateral relations. Ankara should realize this opportunity because this is the very time to make a historic agreement with Armenia."

President Gul will Convey the White House's Message to Tehran
Mainstream Hurriyet reports that during US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Ankara, Turkish and US officials agreed

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on a number of issues, especially the Iran issue. Being aware of President Gul's upcoming visit to Tehran for the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Secretary Clinton said to him "It is obvious that you know Iran better than we do. Your thoughts regarding Iran are very valuable for us. Your meetings on March 11 in Iran are very important for us and we are waiting to hear your impressions anxiously." The paper adds that President Gul will convey the US' moderate messages to Iranian President Ahmedinejad when he meets him in Tehran. Meanwhile, FM Babacan left for Tehran to attend the ECO. Speaking to journalists prior to his departure from Ankara, Babacan said "if requested, Turkey could mediate between the US and Iran."

In a related story, mainstreams Sabah and Hurriyet report that FM Babacan expressed his concern regarding President Obama's April 24 message during his interview with NTV and said "Even though Obama's decision to visit Turkey is a strong message that might indicate he will not use the word "genocide", time will show. At this point, I still see a risk."

Large Crowd Celebrate Prophet's Birth Rallying in Diyarbakir
Mainstream Milliyet, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet and Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak report that on the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, more than 35,000 people held a rally in Diyarbakir's main city square. The Mustazaf Der, known to be the "civic" affiliate of the Turkish Hizbullah, organized the rally with the participation of several organizations under "The Platform for the Prophet's Followers." Men and women were separated in the rally. Participants carried Palestine flags and posters of the Lebanese Hizbullah leader, Hasan Nasrallah.

Meanwhile, the state-owned TRT's Kurdish channel, TRT-6, aired Sunday night a sermon in Kurdish on the occasion of the Mevlid Kandili, a holy night marking the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. The program, which included Koran recitation, prayers and sermons by local muftis, was prepared by the TRT in cooperation with the religious affairs directorate, Diyanet.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- One Turkish youth (13) was killed and another (12) injured after being shot by Iranian border guards as they attempted to cross from the Saray town in the eastern province of Van into Iran.
- The ruling AKP government will spend 1.3 million lira to fund fuel

and fertilizer aid for farmers, an act seen as "generous subsidies" to agricultural producers prior to the municipal elections March 29.

- The Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITO) head Murat Yalcintas says Turkey was not likely to sign a deal with the IMF before the G-20 summit on April 2, over concerns to be seen as the "only G-20 country dependent on IMF support."

- There is a 24 percent decrease in trips of Turkish trucks to European countries, as trade between the EU-Turkey diminishes.

International News

- On Sunday, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan traveled to Tehran to attend the 18th foreign ministers meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Babacan will accompany President Abdullah Gul at the March 11 leaders' summit of ECO in Tehran.

- "Tell the ICC prosecutor, the members of the court and everyone who supports this court that they are under my shoe," said Sudan's al-Bashir, who threatens to kick out more aid groups, diplomats and

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peacekeepers during his first trip to Darfur after the ICC issued an arrest warrant against him.

- Iran says it "successfully" tested a new air-to-sea missile with a range of 110 km.

- Israeli Education Minister Yuli Tamir voices hopes that Turkey would "renew efforts" for arranging talks between Israel and Syria.

JEFFREY